

To Protect and Serve
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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While our congressional representatives in Washington, D.C. debate proposals to curb illegal immigration, residents of the First District feel its effects acutely right here in our communities.

The presence of migrant camps in McGonigle Canyon and other areas pose a risk to the surrounding communities and to the migrants themselves. Fires set for warmth and to cook food could spark a brush fire, endangering the migrants and nearby homes. The lack of toilet facilities in the camps has led some men to use the city's stormwater system, which could endanger the local watershed. And the ratcheting up of emotional rhetoric about federal immigration policy has led to confrontations between migrant activists and opponents of illegal immigration, which poses a danger to all involved.

I recently joined SDPD Captain Jim Collins at a meeting of the PQ Planning Board to talk about public safety issues in the community. Many people had questions and concerns about the migrant camps. Residents have the right to feel safe, and homeless workers have the right to safe and clean housing. I believe that it is in everyone's best interest to move migrant workers out of our canyons.

That's why my office is working with the San Diego Police Department, various city departments and local landowners to remove the camps, and secure the land to deter future encampments. I had hoped we would be able to find transitional housing for documented migrant workers, but the City has been unable to find a suitable site to build temporary dorm-like shelters, which would be funded with a state grant.

It is my sincere wish that legal residents of the camps find a safe place to live, and that migrants that are in the country illegally either return home or apply for permanent residency.

I want to publicly thank Captain Collins, Captain Boyd Long and the men and women of the San Diego Police Department for the professional and humane way in which they approach their job to protect all residents of San Diego, without regard to legal status.

The past several years of turmoil at City Hall have taken their toll on our police department. Officers are leaving the SDPD at an alarming rate. Over 200 officers will have left the department by the end of the year, and the City is not able to hire enough new officers to cover them.

Last month, Mayor Jerry Sanders and Police Chief William Lansdowne presented a plan to recruit and retain sworn officers. That is a good first step. If we are to truly make public safety our top priority, the City must be willing to put its money where its mouth is. The City Council is willing to work with the mayor and the Police Officers

Association to offer financial incentives that will encourage our officers to stay in San Diego.